DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 052 896 RE 003 694

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TITLE A Reading Improvement Program for Student Teachers.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the meeting of the International Reading Association, Atlantic City, N.J., Apr. 19-23, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *College Programs, Comprehension Development, *Developmental Reading, *Preservice Education, Reading Instruction, Reading Skills, *Remedial Reading Programs, *Student Teachers, Teacher Education, Vocabulary Development, Word Study Skills

ABSTRACT

A reading improvement program for student teachers was designed to help them to (1) understand the reading process, (2) secure fundamental reading skills, (3) read critically and comprehend aesthetic aspects of certain types of reading materials, (4) integrate and apply problem solving skills, and (5) understand the importance of vocabulary to thinking and understanding. Comprehensive diagnostic and post-instructional evaluation procedures were employed for the 27 students whose grade equivalent scores ranged from 7.0 to 14, with a mean of 9.89. Each student worked in competition with himself and kept his own records. In addition to graded reading materials, textbooks, and workbooks, students used newspapers and magazines such as Harper's, Saturday Review, the New York Times, and the Houston Post to improve their ability to understand opinion shaping, fact and opinion inference, and propaganda. Book talk sessions were also held to share opinions and ideas about books of common interest. Vocabulary encountered in these readings formed a basis for studying context clues, syllabication, and other word attack skills. Aesthetic appreciation of reading materials was encouraged through closed-circuit televised sessions of play readings. At the end of the year the mean gain in total reading achievement was 2.5 grade levels. References are included. (VJ)

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A READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR STUDENT TEACHERS

by

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In October, 1965, the Director of Elementary Student Teaching gave me a list of names of 14 students who were enrolled in the course Directed Student Teaching and asked me to initiate a reading-improvement program for them. There was no guideline for the development of the program. However, I was given the equivalent grade scores for the students as described by the Iowa Silent Reading Test. The scores ranged from grades 7.0 to 12.5. The mean grade score was 8.72. Inasmuch as students who were enrolled in the student-teaching program were either seniors or in the upper-division of their college work, the need for the reading improvement program was quite apparent. Student teachers who are participating in the present program are also upper classmen.

An informal reading inventory was administered that consisted of individually taped pronunciation of a sampling of words taken from the Thonssen-Gilkinson Word Test (1956), oral reading of paragraphs from College Reader, Wedeen (1958) and an informal spelling test consisting of a random sampling of words from "Test of Words Commonly Spelled Incorrectly." (1946)

Since individual learning requires the learner to set some of his own objectives, individual conferences were held with the students during which the profiles of their scores on the Iowa and their spelling tests were discussed. There was almost a one-to-one correspondence between immediate individual objectives and individual reading problems. The overall goals of the program were to a) understand the process of reading, b) secure practice in a range of fundamental reading skills, c) improve the ability to read critically and to comprehend aesthetic aspects of certain types of reading materials d) integrate and apply problem-solving skills that are developed by reading, and e) understand the importance of vocabulary to thinking and understanding. The reading behavior that most of the students displayed in reacting to the diagnostic tests suggested that the program should not only emphasize techniques of reading, but content and concepts as well.

Our stock of graded materials in 1965 consisted of the SRA Better Reading Books 1, 2, and 3 (1961), SRA Reading Laboratories IV-A (1959), Tactics in Reading (1961), the EDL Study Laboratories for Science, Social Studies and Reference (1962) and a limited assortment of college reading manuals and workbooks. Our stock of the latter-named materials has increased tremendously.

Ever since the inception of the program, each student has worked at his own speed and competed with himself. The increased variety of materials now make it possible for us to have much flexibility in the operation of the program and for students to practice to achieve flexibility in the use of the several techniques of reading.

Toward the end of each semester of the program, students are asked to respond to a form that is designed to elicit their evaluations of the course.

The combined input from the students' evaluations, professional exposure gained by the Center's staff through attendance of professional meetings, the annual operation of a self-help institute, generous amounts of help from

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Doctors Alton Raygor, David Wark, Martha Maxwell and Leonard Braam, who have operated successful reading programs, sprinkled with trial and sometimes error procedures, have enabled us to develop a reading program for student teachers that features the procedures that I will now describe.

Comprehensive diagnostic and post instructional evaluation procedures are employed. The range of reading grade scores for the 37 students who were enrolled in September 1968 was from 7.0 to 14 with a mean grade score of 9.89. Therefore, although the distribution of reading grade scores is skewed a little less to the left than was true with the students who were enrolled in 1965, the basic difference in the composition of the group is minute.

Each student keeps his own record of his reading practices and materials. This task is facilitated by the use of some few commercially-prepared forms augmented by a comprehensive set of "home-made" ones on which one can keep his own test records, lists of newspapers and magazines that are used as learning materials, titles of books that were read for book talks and other such items that will enable him to review his reading activities as a basis for planning further strategies for the improvement of his reading.

Newspapers and Magazines

In addition the selected sections from textbooks and workbooks, students use Harper's, Saturday Review, the New York Times, The Houston Post and the Houston Chronicle as reading materials. A wide spectrum of genre is met in news and magazine articles that are pertinent to today's problems and capture students' interests. The structured reading tasks performed while reading current materials provide a means for integrating study and critical reading skills. Since the extension of vocabulary is basic to reading improvement, the reading of current news provides endless opportunities for the student to learn multiple meanings of words, shades of word meanings, word origins and word signals. It is also a comfortable way for students to learn that words stand for things, experiences, relationships and concepts.

Dependent upon the reading behavior that is evidenced by the given student, some of the following reading tasks may be assigned:

1. Underline the figurative expressions that appear in the article.
2. Identify the techniques that the author of a particular magazine article used to clarify his ideas - such as use of anecodotes, analogy, examples, etc.
3. Clip an editorial cartoon out of the paper and write a brief explanation of the cartoon. Please use the names of the persons who are caricatured in the cartoon.
4. Mark, or otherwise identify, topic ideas and supporting details in a newspaper or magazine article.
5. Underline each word or phrase in a given article that signals a change in thought or the trend of the discussion.
6. Skim the article to find the following types of information:
   a. Why comparisons have been made between two items or ideas.
   b. What happens when a certain process is followed.
   c. Which persons were the protagonist of a movement, etc.

The tasks just listed are samples of the many possibilities for the use of current news to promote growth in the ability to understand a) sources of shaping opinions, b) the fact that everything that is in print is not necessarily true, c) the difference between fact and opinion, d) inference,

e) slanting of news, and f) outright propaganda.

Book Talks

The current syndrome of choosing books that were either written by black authors or whose contents involve various interrelationships between minority and majority races is very pronounced among student teachers at Texas Southern at this time. Nigger, Gregory, Manchild in the Promised Land, Brown, Soul on Ice, Cleaver, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, and The Long Journey, Poitier, are a few of the several titles that have been chosen for group book talks. Inasmuch as the students in the program are prospective teachers, I have occasionally asked them to react to the following or a similar stimulus question:

> Clause Brown (or some other author) was once a pupil in an elementary school. What steps would you, as a teacher, have taken to challenge him and counteract some of the influences operating in his environment?

The reading of The True Believer, Hoffer, not only stimulated much heated discussion but provided a rich source for the study of vocabulary in context as well. The following ten concept-laden terms were chosen at random from many that appeared in the book:

> imperviousness, monolithic, theoreticians, grandiose, ascetic, heretic, sanguine, ignobile, fanatical, and camaraderie

Although the complexity of words that are met in much of the reading material that many college students use is beyond the phonic and structural elements learned in the elementary grades, I have found that it is sometimes necessary to review or teach student teachers the principles of word attack and provide much structured help in making effective use of the dictionary. The many unfamiliar polysyllabic words that students met in such books as The True Believer and Brave New World were used as bases for reviewing principles of syllabication and structural analysis.

Closed-Curcuit Televised Sessions of Play Reading

An important but sometimes neglected level of reading comprehension is the one which deals with the ability to enjoy with additional profit, what is read. Aesthetic appreciation of reading materials is an expected outcome of literal and critical comprehension. Student teachers, of all pre-professionals, should have mastery of comprehension skills that enable them to understand character development, plot, conflict and style. They should perform some reading tasks that enable them to see beyond the characters in the play and the lines that they speak to understand the deeper stated and implied meanings that the author had in mind. The training sessions on play-reading are designed to provide opportunities to enjoy literary ideas, share the experiences of others while getting insight into human nature, understand themselves and society and develop imagination. As prospective teachers, the students obtain an understanding of such concepts as tradedy, comedy, melodrama, satire, farce, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, etc.

Scenes and acts have been excerpted from some of the plays that appear in Seven One-Act Plays, Shaw (1958), Ceremonies in Dark Old Men, Edler (1969), Simply Heavenly, Hughes et al (1953), Happy Ending and Day of Absence, Ward (1966), and The World of Carl Sandburg, Corwin (1960, 1961).

Evaluation

Each time the program is completed with a group of student teachers, each student superimposes his post-test profile over the profile of his beginning reading status. Increments of mean gain in total reading achievement have ranged from 1.0 in 1965 to 2.5 in May, 1969.

The program is still in search of a more functional model. Thus far, the program has been based on credible support in learning theory or experimental evidence. We have maximized the use of self-help and programmed materials. Although those of us who are involved long for bigger gain scores and more evidences of growth in reading achievement at the end of each period of treatment, we have many reasons to be encouraged.

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